

Oswald, the Soviets and U.S. Intelligence

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By MICHAEL LEDEEEN

Although most people are convinced that innumerable secrets of our nation's life lie buried in the vaults of the government's archives, awaiting the expiration of 75-year restrictions before coming to light, few could have dreamed of the information Edward Jay Epstein has somehow uncovered and analyzed in one of the year's most important books.

The book's subtitle is somewhat misleading; for while "Legend" contains a

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impossible for the CIA to refuse Nosenko, and the Russian came to America, where he told his story: There had been no connection whatsoever, Nosenko said, between Oswald and Soviet intelligence.

Many experts at the Agency doubted Nosenko's credibility, and eventually came to believe that he had been sent over as a "disinformation agent," who told the

Americans what they wanted to hear, and thus protected Soviet interests. Mr. Epstein supports this theory, and his case is all the more convincing because he provides an excellent analysis of the history of similar operations by the Soviet Union.

For the most part, secret information about the U.S.S.R. comes through two channels: technological devices and Soviet defectors. In the case of information about the KGB, the latter is virtually the only source. How could it be otherwise? In the most closed organization of a closed society, penetration by American agents is next to impossible, and this difficulty produces the reliance on defectors. But the Russians are well aware of this, and ever since the 1917 revolution they have attempted to plant ostensible defectors within Western intelligence structures in order to confuse and paralyze their enemies.

The Nosenko case was typical: The Americans badly needed information about Oswald's Soviet connection, but by its very nature this could only come from the Soviet side. The appearance of Nosenko was hence providential, but it had all the earmarks of a "plant." How can such information be checked? In the Nosenko case, the FBI believed it had a way, because a known KGB agent—code-named "Fedora"—had been passing information to Hoo-

ver's agents from his post within the Soviet delegation to the United Nations. And "Fedora" confirmed Nosenko's story, point by point. However, some of the information supplied by Nosenko and confirmed by "Fedora" turned out to be false, and this suggests that both Nosenko and "Fedora" were part of the Soviet disinformation network.

All of this would be sufficient to make the Epstein book significant, for rarely have we been given a view of the counter-intelligence process so lucid and so serious. But there is still more, for Epstein strongly implies that the Russians may have planted one of their agents—a "mole"—in the American counterintelligence establishment that was evaluating Nosenko's information. An important Soviet defector told the CIA in the 1950s that such a plant had occurred, and the presence of a "mole" might explain how "Fedora" knew enough to be able to corroborate Nosenko's lies.

It is specially interesting, in light of this possibility, that several years after the Oswald incident, Nosenko was rehabilitated by the CIA, and his accusers were purged—part of the general rage which swept through Washington in the wake of the revelations leaked by the Pike and Church committees. Epstein's book is in one sense the first reply from those who were the victims of that period, and "Legend" will undoubtedly become part of the general debate over the CIA which is about to begin in Washington on the occasion of the proposed legislation dealing with the intelligence community.

Mr. Ledeen is executive editor of *The Washington Review of Strategic and International Studies*.

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